

I heard 'Abdallah b. Yusuf al-Isfahani say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Razi say: I heard al-Jurayri say: I heard al-Junayd say: "Once I came to visit al-Sari al-Saqati and found him crying. I asked him: 'What made you cry?' He answered: 'Yesterday, my daughter came to me and said: This is a hot night, therefore I will hang this [water-cooling] pitcher here. Then I closed my eyes and fell asleep. In my dream I saw a most beautiful slave girl who had descended from heaven. I asked to whom she belonged. She said that she would belong to whoever did not drink the water that was cooled in a pitcher. I then grabbed the pitcher and smashed it to pieces against the ground.'"

Al-Junayd said: "I [indeed] saw pieces of broken earthenware that he never picked up or touched, until it was completely covered with dust."//42

Abu Nasr Bishr b. al-Harith al-Hafi (the Barefoot)⁵³

He came from [the city of] Marw.⁵⁴ He lived in Baghdad, where he died. He was a son of 'Ali b. Khashram's sister. He died in the year 227 [842]. He was a man of great stature. The following [episode] became the reason for his repentance.⁵⁵ He found on the road a small piece of paper upon which was written the name of God – may He be great and exalted. This sheet was trampled upon [by passers-by]. He picked it up, purchased a *dirham*-worth of perfume, sprinkled the sheet with it and put it in the crack of a wall. Then he saw in a dream as if someone told him: "O Bishr, you perfumed My name and I will perfume yours in this world and the next one!"

I heard Master Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: "Bishr was passing by a group of people who said: 'This man does not sleep all night and he breaks his fast only once in three days.' On hearing this, Bishr began to cry. When someone asked him why, he said: 'Verily, I do not remember ever saying that I keep vigil during the whole night. Nor have I said that after fasting during the day I do not break my fast at night. However, God, in His kindness and graciousness, has revealed to the hearts [of the people] more than His servant actually does – may He be blessed!' He then proceeded to describe the beginning of the affair,⁵⁶ as we have just mentioned."

I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard Muhammad b. 'Abdallah al-Razi say: I heard 'Abd al-Rahman b. Abi Hatim say: I came to know that Bishr b. al-Harith al-Hafi said: "In a dream I saw the Prophet – may peace and blessings be upon him! He asked me: 'Bishr, do you know why God has raised you above your contemporaries?' I said: 'I do not, Messenger of God.' He said: '[It is due to] your following of my custom, your service to the righteous, your admonition of your brothers [in faith] and your love of my Companions

53 On him see *IM*, pp. 49–50.

54 An ancient city in present-day Turkmenistan.

55 The journey on the mystical path usually begins with repentance.

56 That is, his conversion to Sufism.

and my family. This is what brought you to the stations of the most pious men!”

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him – say: I heard Muhammad b. ‘Abdallah al-Razi say: I heard Bilal al-Khawwas say: “As I was traveling across the desert of the Israelites,⁵⁷ I suddenly saw a man walking by my side. At first I was surprised, but then I came to realize that that was al-Khadir⁵⁸ – peace be upon him. I asked him: ‘By God, who are you?’ He answered: ‘Your brother al-Khadir!’ I told him that I had a question for him. He said: ‘Ask!’ ‘What do you say about al-Shafi‘i⁵⁹ – may God have mercy on him?’ He answered: ‘He was a [spiritual] peg.’⁶⁰ I then asked him: ‘What would you say about Ahmad b. Hanbal?’⁶¹ He answered: ‘He was a veracious man.’⁶² ‘And what would you say about Bishr al-Hafi?’ He answered: ‘After him there was no one like him.’⁶³ I asked him: ‘Owing to what was I able to see you?’ He answered: ‘Owing to your pious behavior toward your mother.’”

I heard Master Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq – may God have mercy on him – say: “Once Bishr al-Hafi came to Mu‘afa b. ‘Imran⁶⁴ and knocked on his door. He was asked who it was and he said: ‘Bishr al-Hafi (the Barefoot).’ Then a young girl told him from behind the door: ‘If you were to buy yourself a pair of sandals for a couple of *daniqs*,⁶⁵ you would lose your name.’” Muhammad b. ‘Abdallah al-Shirazi reported this story to me. He said: ‘Abd al-‘Aziz b. al-Fadl told me: Muhammad b. Sa‘id told me: Muhammad b. ‘Abdallah told me: He said that he heard ‘Abdallah al-Maghazili say that he heard Bishr al-Hafi mention this story. I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu ‘Al-Husayn al-Hajjaji//44 say: I heard al-Mahamili say: I heard al-Hasan al-Masuhi say: I heard Bishr al-Harith telling this story.

I heard Muhammad b. al-Husayn say: I heard Abu ‘Al-Fadl al-‘Attar say: I heard Ahmad b. ‘Ali al-Dimashqi say: Abu ‘Abdallah b. al-Jalla⁶⁶ told me: “I saw

57 Probably the Sinai desert.

58 On this legendary personage (usually identified with Moses’ mysterious companion in Q. 18:59–81), whom the Sufis consider their holy patron, see the article “al-Khadir” in *EI*.

59 A great jurist and the founder of one of the four Sunni legal schools. See the article “al-Shafi‘i” in *EI*.

60 That is, a member of the invisible hierarchy of the saints who are the real rulers of the universe. The peg (*watad*) is a high, although not the highest, rank in this saintly hierarchy. His name indicates that his function is to keep the universe stable.

61 Another great Sunni scholar, the founder of the Hanbali school of jurisprudence. On him see the article “Ahmad b. Hanbal” in *EI*.

62 *Siddiq* (lit. “faithful”, “truthful” or “just”); in the Sufi tradition this Qur’anic term (Q. 4:71) denotes an advanced rank of sainthood. Cf. Al-Sarraj, *Al-luma‘*, p. 72.

63 That is, no one better than him.

64 Al-Mu‘afa b. ‘Imran b. Nufayl al-Azdi al-Mawsili (d. between 184 and 186/800–802), a famous ascetic of Baghdad.

65 Also *danaq*, a small copper coin worth one-sixth of a *dirham*.

66 On him see page 47.

Dhu 'l-Nun,⁶⁷ who was famous for his clear expression.⁶⁸ I saw Sahl,⁶⁹ who was famous for his allegorical allusion. I saw Bishr al-Hafi, who was famous for his scrupulousness.⁷⁰ Someone asked him: ‘To whom of them are you more inclined?’ He said: ‘To my teacher, Bishr b. al-Harith.’” It is said that for many years he craved beans, but he [never permitted himself to] eat them. Someone saw him in a dream after he⁷¹ had died and asked him how God treated him. He [Bishr] answered: “[God] pardoned me and said: ‘Eat, O you who have not eaten! Drink, O you who have not drunk!’”

Shaykh Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami – may God have mercy on him – told me: ‘Ubaydallah b. ‘Uthman b. Yahya told me: Abu ‘Amr b. al-Sammak told me: Muhammad b. al-‘Abbas told me: Abu Bakr b. Bint Mu‘awiyya said: I heard that Abu Bakr b. ‘Affan said: I heard Bishr b. al-Harith say: “For forty years I was craving roasted meat, yet I never could afford its price due to the lack of untainted money.”⁷²

Someone asked Bishr what he was eating his bread with. He answered: “I think of salvation⁷³ and make it my seasoning.”⁷⁴ I was told about this by Muhammad b. al-Husayn – may God have mercy on him. He said ‘Ubaydallah b. ‘Uthman told: Abu ‘Amr b. al-Sammak related to us: ‘Umar b. Sa‘id said: Ibn Abi al-Dunya related to us that a certain man said that this famous story [is indeed] about Bishr.

Bishr said: “That which is permitted tolerates no wastefulness.”⁷⁵

Someone saw Bishr in a dream and asked him: “What did God do to you?” He answered: “He pardoned me and gave me a half of Paradise, then said: ‘Bishr, even if you were to perform your [ritual] prostrations before Me on the burning coals, you would still be unable to repay Me for the [exalted] place that I allotted you in the hearts of My servants.’”

Bishr said: “A man who loves to be known to people will not taste the sweetness of the Hereafter.”//45

Abu ‘Abdallah al-Harith al-Muhasibi⁷⁶

He was unique in his age in regard to [religious] knowledge, pious scrupulosity, acts of devotion and mystical states. He came from Basra and died in Baghdad in

67 A famous Sufi of Egypt; on him see pages 19–20.

68 *Ibara*, a clear, unambiguous expression or speech – as opposed to *ishara*, a mystical allusion, which is often ambiguous in order to conceal its true meaning from the uninitiated.

69 Sahl al-Tustari (d. 283/896), a famous Sufi of Basra; on him see Böwering, *Mystical Vision*, passim.

70 *Wara‘*; a Sufi term denoting scrupulous discernment between what is permitted (under the shari‘a law) and what is prohibited.

71 Meaning Bishr.

72 That is, the money that he would consider to have been earned in a proper way.

73 Literally, “health” (*al-‘afiya*), but here it probably means “health in the Hereafter”.

74 That is, spices that enhance the taste of food.

75 That is, the permitted is rare and hard to come by.

76 On him see *IM*, pp. 43–48.